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ABSTRACT

This paper reports on a procedure designed to alter racial bias in preschool children. Sixty 5- and 6-year-old black and white children initially displaying baseline bias (as assessed with a modified version of the Preschool Racial Attitude Measure) were taught to respond neutrally by manipulating those cues related to social perception (i.e., facial cues, gestures, and contextual cues), rather than those cues associated with color of the stimulus figure. Subjects were randomly assigned to one of three conditions: (1) a control group; (2) a training condition in which race was always an irrelevant cue in making responses; and (3) a training condition in which race was never an irrelevant cue in making responses. The present procedure significantly reduced bias ($p < .0005$) and increased the probability that evaluative decisions would be made only in the presence of appropriate social and contextual cues ($p < .0001$). Critical variables identified as influencing results were those related to perceiving social cues rather than learning to ignore irrelevant cues (such as race) of the stimulus. Results also indicated that a significant number of black children displayed bias patterns distinctly different from those pro-white patterns evident in previous literature. At pretest, these subjects displayed predominantly pro-black and neutral bias patterns. Subsequent research is necessary to determine if these findings mark a trend of black children becoming more own-race oriented. (Author/SB)

# Strategy to Modify Racial Attitudes in Black and White Preschoolers

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Paper presented at the
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# Strategy to Modify Racial Attitudes in Black and White Preschool Children

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The procedure to be described today is unique, not primarily because it was highly effective in reducing bias to neutral baselines, but because in this procedure the child was taught to employ a strategy which could be generalized outside the experimental setting. The child was provided with a situation specific mode of evaluating other individuals, as well as taught to base evaluative judgments upon the specific social perception cues of the situation; not upon generalized stereotyped rules such as skin color.

Researchers in the area of racial attitude assessment with young children have consistently reported the following: 1) racial attitudes are evident and statistically pronounced by age four, 2) these attitudes are in a significantly pro-white/anti-black direction, and 3) the patterns are similar for both black and white children. These findings do not change as a function of methodology, instrument, or race of the experimenter. Further, procedures designed to alter these biases have not been successful (Hauserman, Walen, & Behling, 1973; Hraba & Grant, 1970; Litcher, Johnson, & Ryan, 1973; McAdoo, 1972).

A few studies employing reinforcement techniques have met with limited success in reducing bias (Edwards & Williams, 1970; Spencer & Horowitz, 1973; McMurtry & Williams, 1973; Williams & Edwards, 1969). However, the major shortcoming in all these studies has been that race has been defined as an appropriate cue for evaluative decision making about an individual. In these procedures the subject was taught to reverse prior associations, such that pro-black/anti-white responses would win tokens and/or pro-white/anti-

black responses would cause the loss of pennies. These procedures have reduced bias to neutral levels, but the child has also learned that race is an appropriate cue upon which to base evaluative judgments about individuals.

The present procedure was designed and implemented to alter biases by teaching the child to attend to social perception cues (i.e., facial cues, gestures, and contextual cues) as appropriate for decision making, while other cues such as race were defined as irrelevant to evaluative decision making. The present procedure was highly effective in reducing initial baseline biases to a neutral level for black and white subjects.

Sixty black and white, lower middle class, 5 and 6 year olds were given a modified version of the Preschool Racial Attitude Measure to assess baseline bias responding. Those children demonstrating sufficient bias were randomly assigned to one of three conditions: a control which spent 25 minutes with the experimenter on a neutral task, or one of two training conditions (TRT II & III). Both training groups were exposed to pictorial stimuli with stories incorporating evaluative adjectives and taught to attend to social perception cues within the picture and to make decisions only in the presence of these cues. A verbal correction procedure was employed for errors. Additionally, the two training groups were exposed to pictorial stimuli with irrelevant, non-social cues (i.e. no gestures, neutral expressions, no activity). For these non-cued probes, the correct response was "I can't tell from the picture" or "There's not enough information in the picture". For TRT II, race was <u>always</u> a possible irrelevant cue, as the stimuli depicted pairs of black and white figures. Thus, these children learned to attend to appropriate social cues and to ignore irrelevant cues,

including race. Subjects in TRT III were shown pictorial stimuli in which race was never a possible irrelevant cue, as the picture sets showed either two white figures or two black figures.

The training strategy affected dramatically the racial attitudes of the children involved in training. The major dependent variables were decrease in bias score, and corresponding increase in "I can't tell" responses at post test. As can be seen in Table 1, there were no race effects within or between conditions. (TRT II and III were significantly different from the control, but not from each other.) The critical variables identified as influencing the results were those cues related to social perception and not those related to color of the stimulus figure. Apparently learning which cues were appropriate for evaluative decision making neutralized bias more effectively than learning that additionally, race was irrelevant. The procedure significantly reduced bias ($\bar{z} = 3.388$; $p<.0005$) as indicated by a sign rank test, and increased the probability that evaluative decisions would be made only in the presence of appropriate social and contextual cues $F(2,56) = 17.93$, $p<.00001$, as indicated by a 2x2x2(race x sex x TRT) analysis of variance.

A serendipitous finding of the present study was that at pretest, before intervention, black children in significant amounts, displayed bias patterns which were distinctly different from the pro-white/anti-black patterns evidenced in the literature to date. These children displayed predominantly pro-black and neutral bias patterns. Thus, the extent of racial bias was not equally present in black and white subject populations. It is apparent by inspection of Figure 1 that the vast majority of white subjects displayed strong pro-white/anti-black biases. While the black children, on the other hand, displayed this pattern in only 35% of the cases.

A Chi Square analysis was run comparing the frequencies of pro-white, pro-black, and neutral subjects by race. The difference in racial bias by race was highly significant ($\chi^2(3) = 24.056$; $p < .001$).

A subsequent lower class black population was studied and similar response patterns emerged (Chamberlin-Robinson, 1976) as can be seen in Figure 1. To ascertain whether these patterns might have been a function of social class, a pilot study was undertaken with 40 middle class black preschoolers. While fewer subjects were decidedly pro-black, 70% of the population was either neutral or pro-black (Chamberlin-Robinson, Richardson, & Ellis, 1976). All three populations showed only about 35% pro-white responding, a radical departure from the results of previous literature in this area. Certainly more research is indicated to ascertain whether these results mark a trend that black children are becoming more own race oriented.

The training strategy implemented in the present procedure was effective for all subjects involved in training. There were no age, sex, or race differences. The fact that this strategy was learned, employed, and effective in reducing bias is apparent from an examination of the results from TRT II and III groups. The fact that there were no significant differences either in amount of bias drop, or in increase in "I can't tell" responses indicated that the necessary information to implement evaluative decision making strategies was to teach and reinforce the concept of what was appropriate for decision making. The additional information that race was an inappropriate cue for decision making was not important in reducing bias.

By far the most unusual finding in the present study, and one

that merits further research, was that black children demonstrated far less pro-white/anti-black response patterns than had been previously noted in the literature. Indeed, there was a substantial increase in pro-black as well as neutral bias responding. This may reflect a trend among black youngsters away from negative self-evaluations of the past forty years, and toward more positive own race associations. This was the first time this pattern had been observed among black children. The question of why these data differ so radically from previous research must be addressed.

In the present study, a rare opportunity existed to test both black and white children from similar economic backgrounds in the same setting, thus eliminating the socio-economic confound so often found in comparative research across racial lines. Generally in comparative research of this nature, white subjects have tended to be more middle class than those black subjects tested. And when an "integrated" setting was used, black children were still in a significant minority within the center itself.

Results from the present study, where children were from similar lower class environments and the racial balance of the school was 50% black and 50% white, would indicate that racial bias was at least as high, or even higher, among poor whites than middle class whites. An alternative explanation of these data would suggest that pro-white attitudes were more pronounced in white children when they do not comprise the majority of the school's population.

Conversely, black children may display more pro-black attitudes when they comprise roughly half of the school's ethnic population. Perhaps it was not the integrated situation, per se, that affected racial attitudes, but the degree of mixedness within that integrated

setting. Black children may exhibit fewer pro-white racial attitudes when exposed to white children in a situation where the percentage of black children is at least 50% of the total population.

The strategy used in the training procedure is an important step in the research with racial attitude modification. The procedure employed a concept formation framework in that the child was being taught what types of cues were appropriate in making evaluative decisions. These strategies could easily be generalized from the experimental setting to future situations involving some evaluative component. The use of strategies which actually teach the child useful information or methods of dealing with real world input is essential if the social scientist is to accomplish more than an experimental manipulation which has no applied value beyond the laboratory. The fact that these strategies worked so efficiently and were generalized, shows that this type of procedure is highly effective with black and white preschool children by age five. Future research might employ these strategies with even younger populations.

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TABLE 1

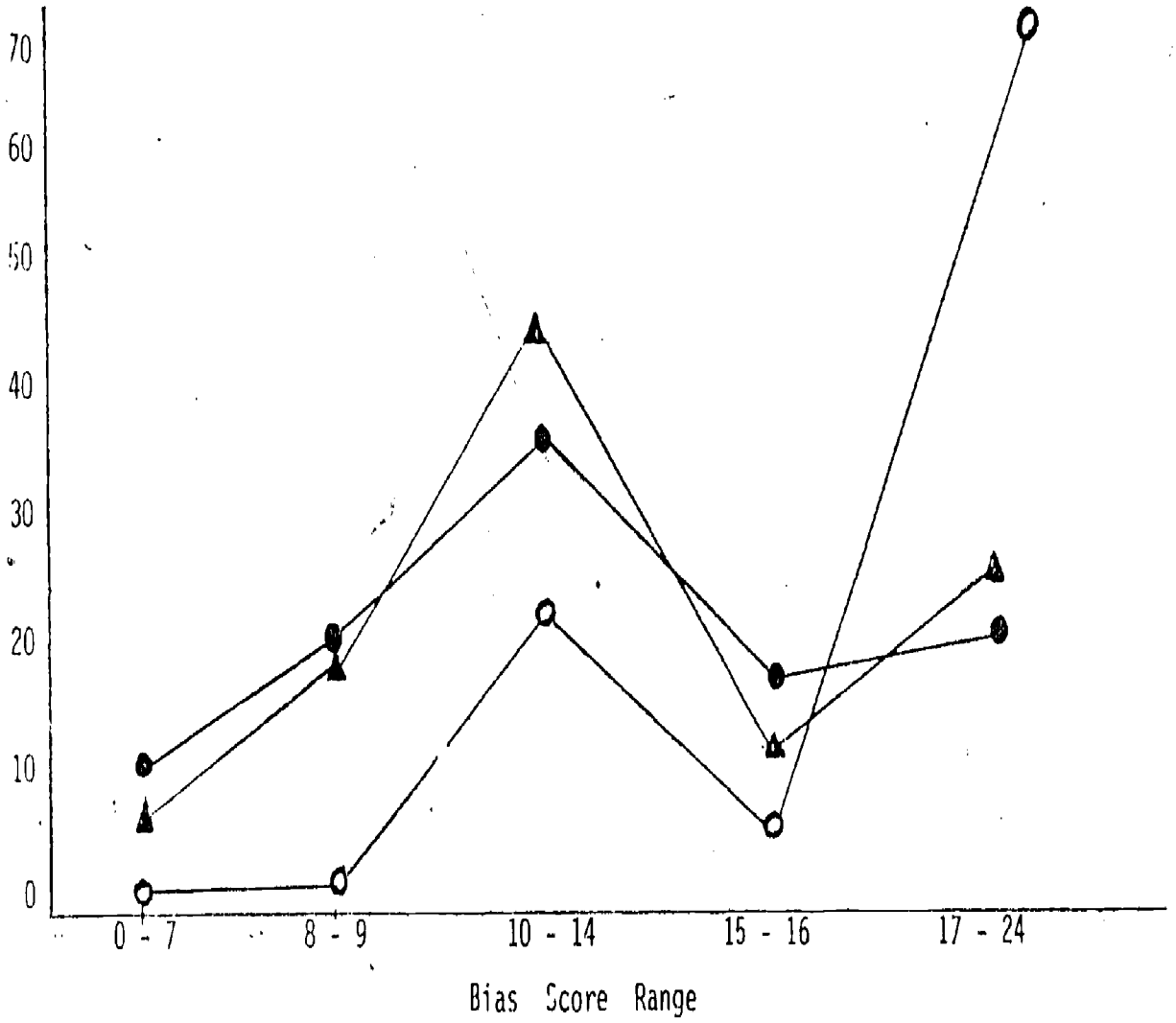
CONTRAST COEFFICIENT MATRIX t-VALUES AND LEVEL OF SIGNIFICANCE FOR "I CAN'T TELL" RESPONSES

| | Black Treatment I | White Treatment I | Black Treatment II | White Treatment II | White Treatment III |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Contrast 1 | 0.5 | 0.5 | -0.5 | -0.5 | 0 |
| Contrast 2 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 1.0 | -1.0 |
| Contrast 3 | 1.0 | 0 | -1.0 | 0 | 0 |
| Contrast 4 | 0 | 1.0 | 0 | -1.0 | 0 |
| Contrast 5 | 0 | 1.0 | 0 | -0.5 | -0.5 |
| Contrast 6 | 0 | 1.0 | 0 | 0 | -1.0 |

| | t-Values | D.F. | t-Probability |
|---|---|---|---|
| Contrast 1 | -8.20 | 37 | .000 |
| Contrast 2 | 1.85 | 37 | .073 |
| Contrast 3 | -5.78 | 37 | .000 |
| Contrast 4 | -5.84 | 37 | .000 |
| Contrast 5 | -5.66 | 37 | .000 |
| Contrast 6 | -4.05 | 37 | .000 |

FIGURE 1

PERCENTAGE OF BIAS BY RACE & SCORE RANGE




KEY

0 - 7 Definite pro-black/anti-white bias
8 - 9 Probable pro-black/anti-white bias
10 - 14 Neutral, no bias
15 - 16 Probable pro-white/anti-black bias
17 - 24 Definite pro-white/anti-black bias

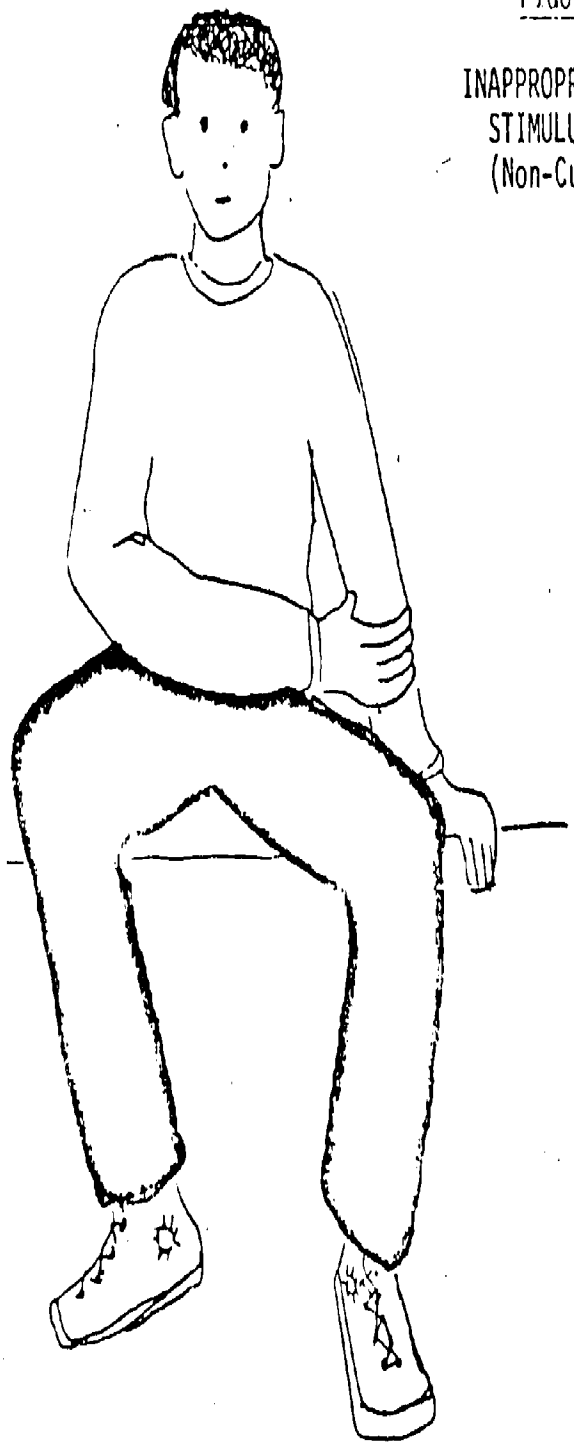
○ = white subjects N = 30

● = black subjects N = 31

▲ = black subjects Center #2 N = 31

FIGURE 2

INAPPROPRIATELY CUED
STIMULUS PICTURE
(Non-Cued Probe)



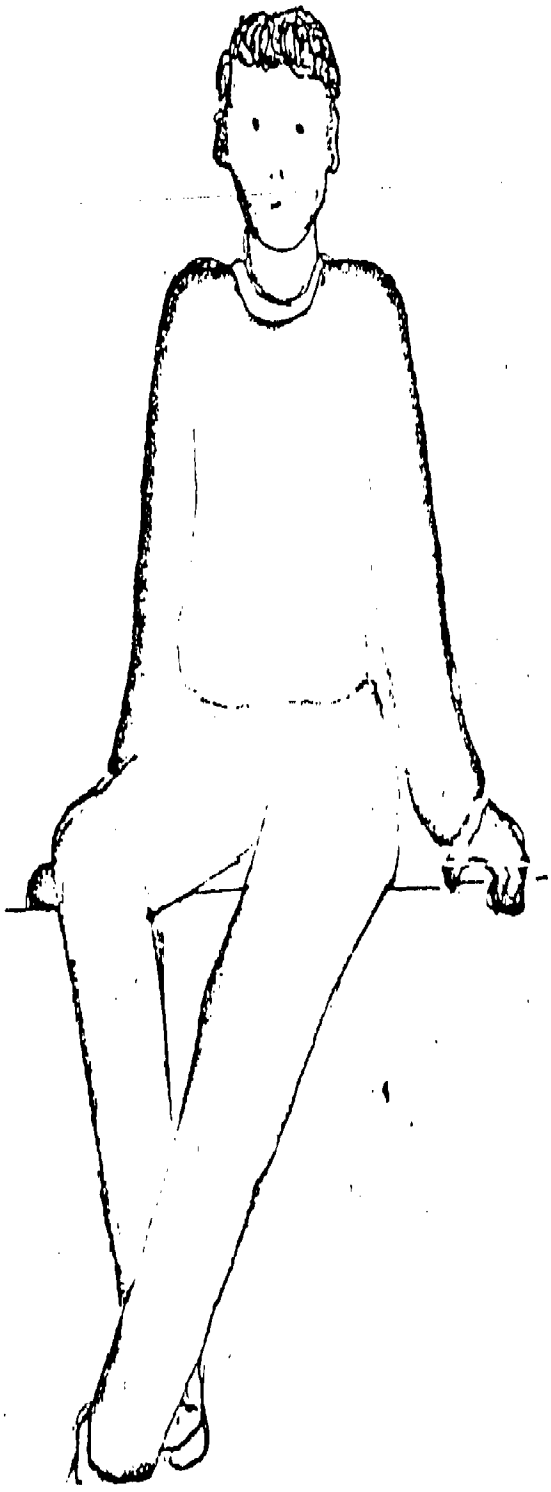
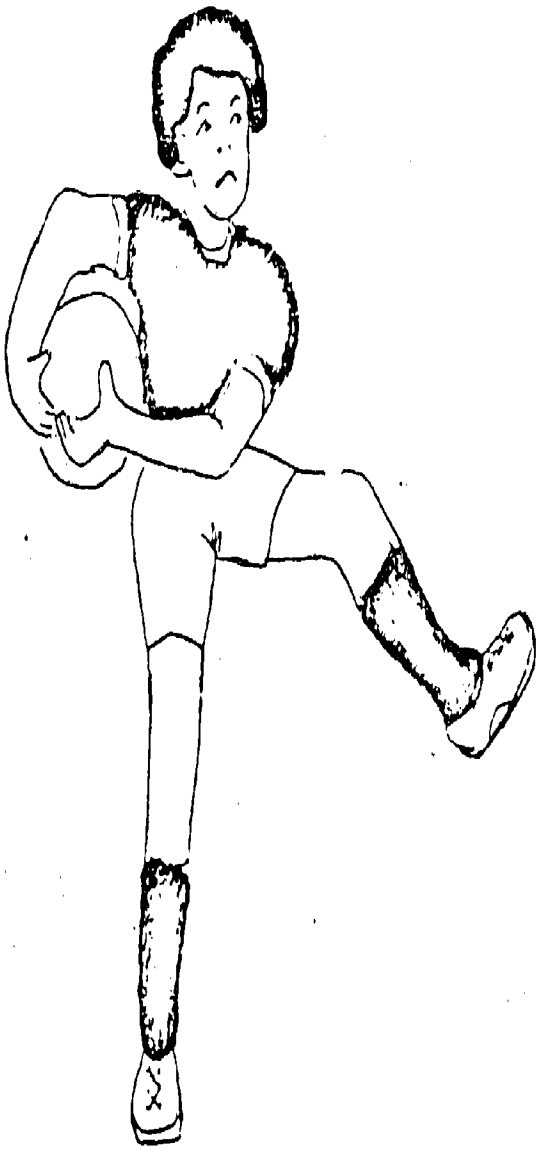


FIGURE 3

TWO APPROPRIATELY CUED
STIMULUS PICTURES



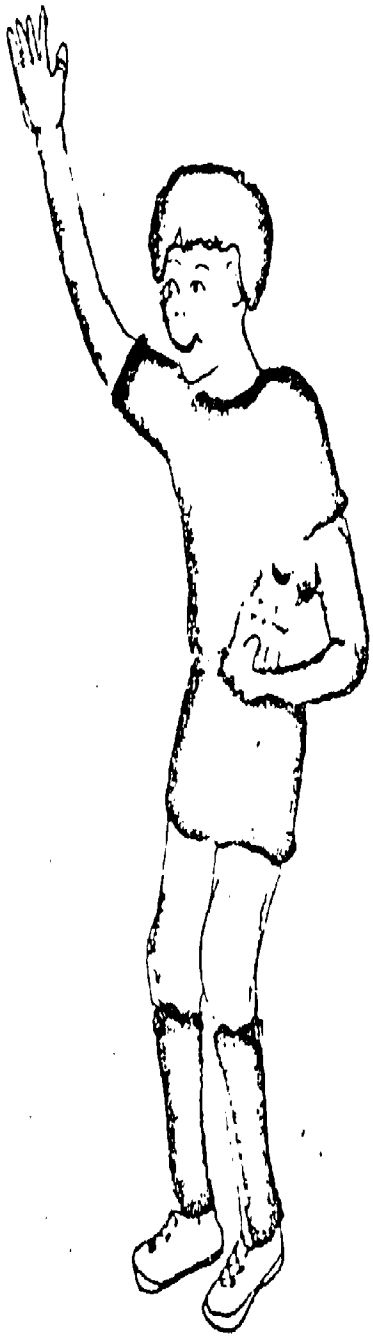


TABLE 2

MEAN PRETEST BIAS SCORES AND STANDARD DEVIATIONS
FOR EXPERIMENTAL SUBJECTS AS A FUNCTION OF TREATMENT AND RACE

| Race | Treatment I | | | Treatment II | | | Treatment III | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Mean | S.D. | N | Mean | S.D. | N | Mean | S.D. | N |
| Black | 17.50 | 3.08 | 10 | 18.00 | 2.74 | 9 | ——— | | |
| White | 18.43 | 2.89 | 8 | 19.50 | 2.62 | 8 | 19.38 | 2.67 | 7 |

TABLE 3

MEAN INCREASE IN "I CAN'T TELL" RESPONSES BY RACE AND CONDITION
(STANDARD DEVIATIONS IN PARENTHESES)

| Race | Condition | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Treatment I (Control) | Treatment II | Treatment III |
| Black | -0.20 (1.48) | 13.11 (7.01) | N / A |
| White | -0.14 (1.07) | 15.00 (7.58) | 10.38 (3.93) |